

## Woodbridge Public Library Oral History Interview

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WPL17

(digital audio)

In 1870 the Boynton Drain & Tile Company was the first manufacturer of hollow tile in this vicinity. C.W. Boynton's plant was ideally located at the mouth of Woodbridge Creek. With extensive frontage on the Staten Island sound it avoided the winding course of the creek. Acker's Canned Tomato Company was doing a thriving business employing thirty to forty workers at the height of the season. Even at this early date the names Boynton and Acker were figuring prominently in the development of East Woodbridge. Mr. H.E. Acker was involved in enterprises other than canning tomatoes. Acker's picnic grove, situated on the Staten Island sound, was rapidly becoming a popular spot among vacationers. The setting was ideal, a cozy picnic grove, a gently sloping beach and clean refreshing salt water for bathing. The location made it the closest seashore resort to New York City. It was but a ferry ride from New York and if one decided to stay the night one could book one of the one hundred rooms at the Sewaren Hotel. The annual event hailed as Saltwater Day did much to promote the waterfront area. Saltwater Day also known as the Great Washing Time and the Harvest Joy Day was held every third Saturday in August to celebrate the reaping of the grain harvest. Farmers and their employers would converge upon the waterfront to indulge in saltwater bathing. Fish of all kinds, clams, crabs and oysters thrived in the pure waters providing a haven for sportsmen as well as commercial fisherman. However farming remained the primary source of income in East Woodbridge and hay the major crop. Very few roads existed in East Woodbridge in the 1870s. Woodbridge Avenue and Old Road weren't just the main roads at that time, they were the only roads. For the most part East Woodbridge was a remote farming area. The popularity of H.E. Acker's picnic grove steadily increased with the arrival of the railroad. The Long Branch Railroad, a part of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, connected Long Branch and New York City and made stops in East Woodbridge. Acker's Grove was so near the depot, only an eight minute walk, that many preferred to travel there by train avoiding a long dusty ride and the cost of renting a carriage. However many visitors did travel to East Woodbridge by horse and carriage. Acker tended to the needs of these visitors by providing stabling for their horses. He accommodated picnic and other pleasure parties with picnic tables and boats for rowing and fishing. With each successive season the crowds of vacationers swelled to even greater numbers. Business thrived at Acker's Grove so much so that Mr. Tappan who owned some property along the waterfront decided to assist Mr. Acker in accommodating the increase of visitors. Mr. Tappan erected bathing houses then he obtained a fast sailing yacht which, with a competent

sailing master, was at the disposal of small parties and the competitive nature of business being what it is Mr. C.W. Boynton was not to be outdone. Inspired to meet the increasing demand for boating, bathing and other pleasure facilities Boynton was determined to outshine his competitors. Realizing the excellent location of his property he advertised Boynton Beach to be the best and safest bathing point upon the sound. Boynton bought fine Whitehall boats for rowing, fishing and crabbing, planted plenty of shade trees, imported white sand for the beach, built first class bathing houses and erected a dance pavilion. Mrs. Ware was on hand to prepare dinners and suppers to order. Boynton Beach offered all this and more. Stages ran from the post office in Woodbridge to the Boynton Dance Pavilion. The cost was twenty-five cents for a round trip or fifteen cents one way. The Pavilion's dance floor was one of the best kept in grand high waxed condition. Orchestras were hired for Saturday night dances; how lovely it was. Dances at the Pavilion were always dress up. The restaurant next to the Pavilion was also the pride of Boynton Beach. Mrs. Boynton's husband, Ernest Harriman, hired the best chefs and Waiters from New York City. As East Woodbridge flourished as a resort area it began to develop as a desirable residential community. After all the advantage of East Woodbridge as a winter home were probably unsurpassed by any all year round suburban resort in the country or so its developers claimed. But in 1876 things began to change. Captain John Taylor Johnson, president of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, had been developing communities along the Jersey shore. Johnson's plan was to draw wealthy businessmen from New York to live in New Jersey. Businessmen could establish residence in any of these charming coastal communities possibly Point Pleasant, Long Branch or Matawan and commute to work by train using the Central Railroad of New Jersey, of course. Realizing the great potential for development in East Woodbridge Johnson bought the Holton property. Then in 1876 the Central Railroad of New Jersey came to East Woodbridge.